



State of New Mexico

ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

NMED's mission is to protect and restore the environment and to foster a healthy and prosperous New Mexico for present and future generations.

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New Mexico, Utah, Navajo Nation, & La Plata County-CO Prepare for Spring Run-off Carrying Heavy Metals

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Plan Provides Protocols to Manage Downstream Effects of EPA's Gold King

Mine Spill on the Animas/San Juan Watershed Communities

Santa Fe – While temperatures warm and the high altitude snowpack in Colorado's Southern Rockies & San Juan Mountains begins to melt, Animas/San Juan watershed communities are getting ready for the re-disturbance of toxic heavy metals in their primary water source. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that they released 880,000 pounds of metals last summer when they triggered a blowout of impounded mine water at the Gold King Mine.

The metals raced through the Animas River in Colorado where the river had faster flows, then meandered more gradually into New Mexico, the Navajo Nation, Utah, and into Lake Powell where the Animas and San Juan Rivers have slower flows. Settling and deposition of metals in the riverbed is greater in the slower flowing portion of the river.

"The States of New Mexico and Utah, the Navajo Nation, and the Colorado County of La Plata are joining to create synchronized monitoring and response protocols for the Animas and San Juan Rivers while the unusually large El Niño snowpack melts, possibly re-disturbing the heavy metals deposited in the watershed last summer," said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ryan Flynn. "Unfortunately, the polluter, in this case the EPA, continues to turn a blind eye to the long-term effects of the Gold King Mine Spill, and has refused to support the regional [Long-Term Monitoring Plan](#) or the [Spring Run-off Preparedness Plan](#)."

Monitoring by the City of Farmington, since the Gold King Mine Spill, correlates increases in turbidity with increases in total lead in the Animas River. These increases are of concern to the public water systems that use the Animas and San Juan Rivers as a water source. Even though total metal concentrations in river water are not a violation of EPA's National Primary Drinking Water Regulations, the regional water systems must ensure that their treatment infrastructure produces drinking water that complies with the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations and they must avoid the possibility of cumulative aggregation of metals in the treatment equipment. The increase of metals in river water is also of concern to irrigators and others who use the river as a source of water supply. In addition to public drinking-water systems, the Animas and San Juan Rivers are used for private domestic water supply, for agricultural irrigation and for livestock watering.

With above average snowpack, 2016 will be the first spring run-off in the Animas and San Juan watersheds after the Gold King Mine spill and it is anticipated to re-suspend significant amounts of the deposited metals.

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